The Defense of Camp Able Sentry

Captain Craig A. Collier

The United Nations Preventive Deployment, begun in 1993, has the mission of preventing the Balkan War from spreading south into Macedonia. The U.S. mission in that effort, called Operation *Able Sentry,* is to observe, monitor, and report any activity along the Serbian-Macedonian border.

Currently, the task force assigned to Macedonia is a mechanized infantry battalion (minus), augmented with an engineer platoon, an aviation detachment, a military police (MP) squad, a civil affairs detachment, and several other elements totaling roughly 600 soldiers, 300 of whom live on Camp Able Sentry. Every six months, a new task force takes over the mission. My battalion, the 3d Battalion, 12th Infantry, 1st Armored Division, deployed from Germany for its six-month tour in 1995. As commander of the headquarters and headquarters company (HHC), I was "commandant" of the camp.

During preparations for this mission, one of the things we had to consider was the defense of the camp. Unfortunately, in spite of the Army's many recent deployments on peacekeeping or stability and support missions, we found that doctrinal references for conducting a base defense were quite limited. Of the field manuals readily available, only a few even mention base defense: Field Manual (FM) 7-98, *Operations in a Low Intensity Conflict* devotes four pages to it; the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) has an Operations Other Than War handbook (No. 94-4, July 1994) containing a few pages on the subject, plus a checklist. Most of this information consists of general concepts with few specifics.

The best manual on conducting a base defense is FM 90-12, *Base Defense: Multi-Service Procedures for Defense of a Joint Base.* It goes into much greater detail and includes a sample base defense plan, a discussion of passive and active defense methods, responses to terrorism, and other useful information.

Still, many of the lessons we learned about securing a base camp in a peacekeeping environment had to come from on-the-job experience.

Adjacent to Skopje International Airport, Camp Able Sentry houses the task force and all the support assets for the 12 observation posts (OPs) along 70 kilometers of the border. Several buildings from an old Yugoslav air defense unit make up the barracks, and warehouse structures house vehicles, a gym, and supplies (Figure 1). Several smaller "accommodation containers," commonly called conexes, make up the rest of the buildings in an area of approximately one-half square kilometer.

Unfortunately, the camp site was chosen for its accessibility and life-support assets, and not for its defensibility. The terrain has two major disadvantages: It is on low ground dominated by several small hills, and it is bordered on three sides by trees and barracks belonging to the Macedonian Army. Only one side, adjacent to a farmer's field, has anything close to good fields of fire and observation.

The main challenge in developing a defensive plan was that of making this poorly situated area defendable against a range of possible attacks, from terrorists to Serbian divisions. And everyone in the camp, except the soldiers in the force protection platoon, had primary jobs other than base defense.

Another problem was that, for political as well as practical reasons, we could not construct "Firebase" Able Sentry. We were there to show a presence, not to hide in our compounds.

The Plan

An attack anywhere in the perimeter would probably have serious political consequences, regardless of the damage. But three areas were particularly sensitive—the barracks, the ammunition supply point (ASP), and the three "Whitehawk" helicopters (UH-60 BlackHawks painted white).

When my unit arrived in May 1995, much passive defensive work had already been done by previous units. Three-foot-high cement pylons and two belts of triple-standard concertina formed the camp perimeter. Heavy steel gates blocked the two entrances to the compound. The main entrance had concrete barriers set up just outside the gate, which forced incoming traffic to slow down before entering. The rear gate, used exclusively by oversized trucks that could not negotiate the front gate barriers, was blocked by an M113 as well as a locked gate. Spread throughout the perimeter were 14 two-man fighting positions and nine 30-foot guard towers.

The first line of defense was the perimeter wire and pylons, watched over by the force protection platoon in the guard towers and the MPs at the front gate. The soldiers on duty had to be alert and fully knowledgeable of the rules of engagement and the appropriate use of deadly force.

At least one squad from the force protection platoon manned the guard towers and patrolled the perimeter 24 hours a day. Another platoon, designated the quick-reaction force (QRF) platoon (the task force reserve) had the mission of responding to any crisis in the American sector, including Camp Able Sentry. Additionally, two soldiers from our attached MP squad manned the front gate.

The second line of defense was the ring of fighting positions around the camp. Four platoons (maintenance, engineer, support, and headquarters company) manned these positions when the camp was alerted.

Accurate intelligence was vital to our preparation. Even a few minutes' notice of an impending attack could be crucial to a successful defense. Everyone needed to understand and rehearse the alert procedures.

The camp operated under the United Nations Preventive Deployment Threatcon system (Figure 2), which is similar to the common Green, Amber, and Red alert system. Green was used for normal, low-threat conditions, Orange signaled an increased threat and primarily applied to the force protection platoon, and Red, a camp general alert, was to be used when an attack was imminent or occurring. Both Green and Orange were to be maintained indefinitely without affecting our operational capability.

Unfortunately, we did not deploy with our Bradley fighting vehicles. The vehicles in the camp consisted mainly of white-painted M113s, HMMWVs (high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles), and five-ton trucks. Except for a few TOW-mounted scout HMMWVs and some AT4s, the largest direct-fire weapons were a dozen .50 caliber machineguns, all

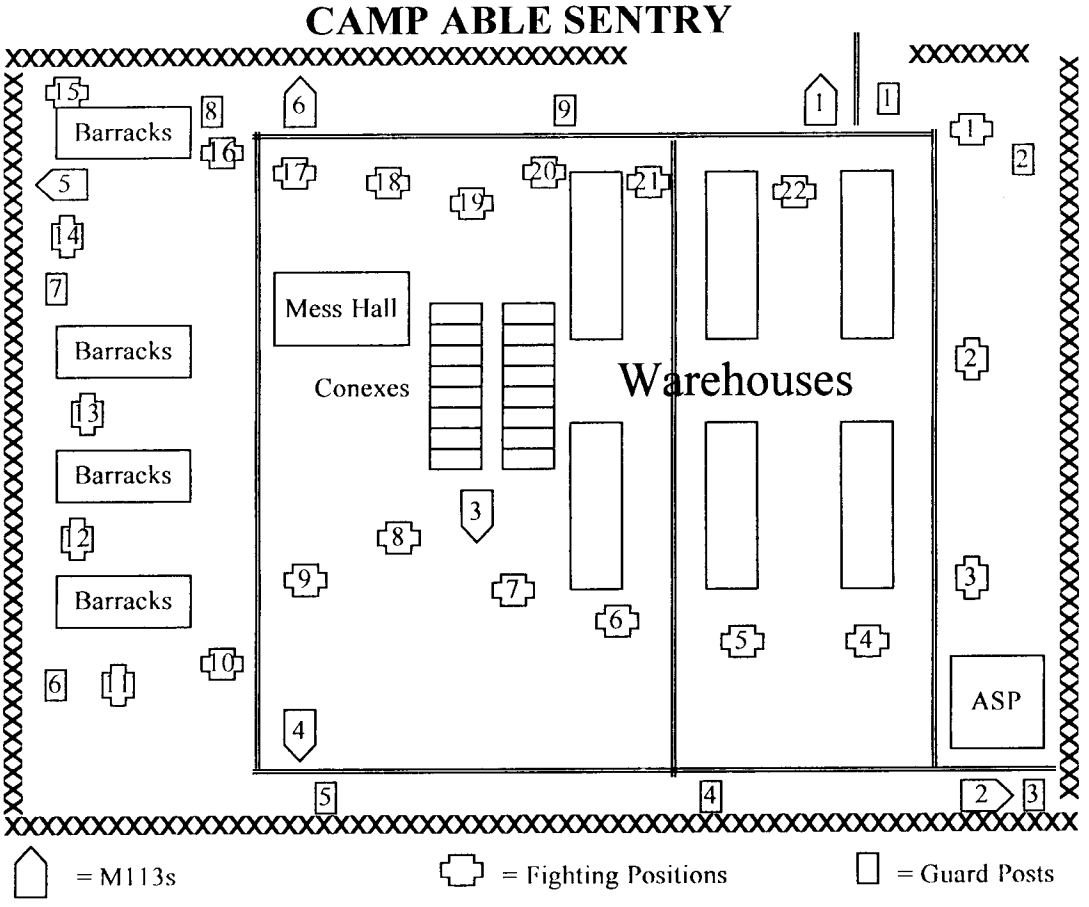

Figure 1

THREATCON MANNING REQUIREMENTS	GREEN	ORANGE		RED	COMMENTS
		DAY	NIGHT		
- Guard Post #1 (Front Gate):	2	2	2	2	MPs full time
- Guard Post #2 (Motorpool West)	1	1	2	2	
- Guard Post #3 (ASP):	1	2	2	2	
- Guard Post #4 (Motorpool East)		1	2	2	
- Guard Post #5 (Helipad NW):		1	2	2	
- Guard Post #6 (Helipad South)	1	1	2	2	
- Guard Post #7 (C Company):	1	1	2	2	
- Guard Post #8 (BOQ/BEQ):	1	1	2	2	
- Guard Post #9 (EM Club):		1	2	2	
- Inside Rover Team #1:	2	2	2	2	
- Inside Rover Team #2:		2	2	2	
- SOG With/Runner:	2	2	2	2	
- Rover Team Helipad:				2	
- Rover Team ASP:				2	
- M113 #1 (GP #1):			2	2	MPs
- M113 #2 (ASP, GP #2):			2	2	
- M113 #3 (Helipad, vic GP #5):				2	
- M113 #4 (Helipad, vic GP #6):				2	
- M113 #5 (BOQ/BEQ, GP #8):				2	
TOTALS:	11	17	28	38	

Figure 2. Threatcon Manning Requirements

THREATCON MANNING REQUIREMENTS (BY NAME)	NAMES		ROOM
- Guard Post #1 (Front Gate):	1)	2)	
- Guard Post #2 (Motorpool West)	3)	20)	
- Guard Post #3 (ASP):	4)	17)	
- Guard Post #4 (Motorpool East)	12)	21)	
- Guard Post #5 (Helipad NW):	13)	22)	
- Guard Post #6 (Helipad South)	5)	23)	
- Guard Post #7 (C Company):	6)	24)	
- Guard Post #8 (BOQ/BEQ):	7)	25)	
- Guard Post #9 (EM Club):	14)	26)	
- Inside Rover Team #1:	10)	11)	
- Inside Rover Team #2:	15)	16)	
- SOG With/Runner:	8)	9)	
- Rover Team Helipad:	35)	36)	
- Rover Team ASP:	37)	38)	
- M113 #1 (GP #1):	18)	29)	
- M113 #2 (ASP, GP #2).	27)	28)	
- M113 #3 (Helipad, vic GP #5):	29)	30)	
- M113 #4 (Helipad, vic GP #6):	31)	32)	
- M113 #5 (BOQ/BEQ, GP #8):	33)	34)	

Figure 3. Force Protection Matrix

mounted on M113s. We had plenty of small arms and the ammunition to go with them, including smoke and hand grenades. Our night vision devices consisted of AN/PVS-7Bs and a handful of UAS-12C thermal night sights to go with the TOWs.

Although the barriers, fighting positions, patrols, and a detailed plan were similar to those in any defense, several key elements of the plan require more explanation:

Force Protection Platoon. This platoon maintained vigilance around the camp perimeter. It fell under the control of the camp commandant, and its manning level requirements reflected the Threatcon. The status was Green most of the time, which meant the platoon had a nine-man squad plus the two MPs on duty at the front gate. Every three weeks a line company platoon rotated from the OPs to assume this force protection duty. In the event of an alert, the platoon had 10 minutes to transition from level Green to Orange or even Red.

The platoon sergeant signed for a variety of equipment. In addition to the equipment organic to his platoon, he had several M113s, a heavy flak vest for every soldier, about 10 Motorola hand-held radios, a few VRC-46 and PRC-126 radios, a dismounted TOW system (with its thermal sight), and ammunition. The M113s, with .50 caliber machineguns, were

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positioned at key areas on the perimeter, while the TOW system was in the tower nearest the ASP. A locked "flex pallet" (a cage six feet long, three feet wide, and three feet deep) located outside the sergeant of the guard (SOG) conex held the platoon ammunition. Another conex nearby contained the rest of the equipment, except for what was needed in the towers.

The Motorola radios were by far the most useful equipment. We found them more reliable than the standard issue Army radios, and the recharger saved us from constantly changing batteries. The dismounted TOW system presented a unique challenge because of the lack of batteries and the direct current needed to operate them (the post operated on alternating current).

Most of the platoon leaders rotated their squads every six or eight hours, depending on the size of the platoon. A four-squad platoon had a much easier time. The MP squad leader rotated his soldiers separately from the force protection platoon, usually every 12 hours.

A few days before reporting for duty, the platoon sergeant inspected and signed for the force protection equipment. When the rest of the platoon arrived to begin duty, either the executive officer or I conducted a detailed in-ranks inspection, paying particular attention to the cleanliness of weapons and the soldiers' knowledge of the ROEs. If a soldier did not pass this inspection, he was not allowed on duty until he corrected the problem and passed the re-inspection. Until then, his buddies pulled his duty for him. This was strictly enforced.

Some time before the platoon assumed duty, I reviewed the standards with the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant. These standards included the following:

- Everyone must memorize and understand the Rules of Engagement and Actions on Hostile Act.
- To prevent boredom and subsequent inattention, a soldier would not be on duty in any single location for more than an hour.
- A squad leader was free to rotate his soldiers among the guard posts any way he wanted so long as he used a different method every time and that method differed from those of the squads before and after his shift. (The idea was to keep the rotation as random as possible so anyone monitoring the guard force could not decipher a rotation pattern.)
- The platoon leader or sergeant would be the officer of the guard and would make at least one daylight and two nighttime checks daily.
- Although the MP squad leader was ultimately responsible for the conduct of his soldiers at the front gate, the MPs on duty fell under the control of the force protection squad leader.
- The guards would use only M16 rifles (no M249 light machineguns). (The M249 easily jams when using a 30-round clip, and aiming and firing single shots is more difficult.)

In an alert the platoon was expected to have 100 percent accountability, all required posts manned, and weapons, equipment, and ammunition issued within ten minutes. These alerts were come-as-you-are affairs; there was no time for anyone to get into uniform. And to avoid confusion, the platoon reacted

the same way, whether it was going to Threatcon Orange or Red.

During alerts, the SOG was the most important man in the camp. He had to know exactly what to do, or the platoon would fail, and camp security would be breached. Typically, an alert would begin with a spot report from one of the guards that he saw two suspicious men with weapons near the back gate. The SOG immediately took the following action:

- Reported the situation to the task force tactical operations center (TOC).
- Sent the roving patrol to the threatened area. (Usually the patrol had monitored the report and was already on its way at a run.)
- Sent his runner to alert the QRF squad leader. The runner gave the squad leader a Motorola radio already set on the force protection frequency.
- Alerted the force protection officer-in-charge (OC) by FM or Motorola, who in turn alerted the rest of the platoon.
- Developed the situation, kept the TOC informed, and prepared for the arrival of the rest of the force protection platoon. The OC took charge when he arrived.

After a few rehearsals, most of the platoons could get the roving patrol to the threatened area within one minute, the QRF squad could be there within two minutes, and the rest of the force protection platoon in their positions within five minutes.

The force protection conex was a hectic place during an alert, with equipment, weapons, ammunition, radios, and night observation devices being issued and reports sent and received. Each platoon had its own unique way of streamlining this process so as to eliminate confusion and meet the time standard. The platoon sergeants pre-arranged the equipment (flak vests and radios), and when the alert sounded, the SOG's runner placed night observation devices and two loaded magazines on each of the flak vests, then issued the weapons. Usually, the OC or another squad leader arrived first and helped with the reports or with the force protection matrix.

This matrix was one of the tools we developed to help the SOG during an alert. It was nothing more than the 38 Threatcon manning requirements in order of fill priority (Figure 3). Positions 1 through 11 were always manned. When soldiers arrived at the SOG conex during the alert, the SOG grabbed the first man ready and sent him, for example, to position 12, which was Guard Post 4 (motorpool east). The second man would be sent to position 13 (Guard Post 5, Helipad NW), and so on. All of the SOGs copied the matrix onto the dry erase board in the conex and simply wrote the name of the soldier in the blank space when the time came.

I gave the platoon leader a few days to conduct his own alert rehearsals before I alerted him myself. Several times during their internal rehearsals, the platoons developed a technique that worked so well I incorporated it into the SOP. After several rehearsals, most of the platoons met the standard in five minutes or less.

We had a real alert three times during our rotation (when the power went out one night, when a Macedonian taxi rushed up to the front gate, and when a guard spotted a man with a weapon moving toward the perimeter). In each case, the force protection platoon acted properly on its own, without supervision, and well within the time standard. The rehearsals paid off.

The Quick Reaction Platoon. The quick reaction platoon responded to any threat in the American sector, including the camp. One squad was always on standby, in BDUs with weapons and equipment handy, in the QRF shack adjacent to the force protection SOG conex. In case of an attack on the camp, the QRF squad fell under the immediate command of the force protection squad leader.

Like the force protection platoon, the QRF platoon signed for M113s, radios, and weapons before they began their rotation. They also worked out of conexes and were kept immediately available. The S-3 was responsible for their training and readiness, and the S-3 Air conducted several QRF rehearsals similar to the ones conducted for the force protection platoon.

Except for a few TOW-mounted scout HMMWVs and some AT4s, the largest direct-fire weapons were a dozen .50 caliber machineguns, all mounted on M113s.

Originally, the camp alert plan did not include a mission for the QRF platoon. Once we began rehearsing the alert plan at Camp Able Sentry, however, we realized that there was a significant gap between the time the roving patrol responded (within one minute) and the time the rest of the force protection platoon arrived (five minutes). Although that may not sound like a long time, four minutes is critical in an alert, and there's only so much a two-man roving patrol can do. The QRF, which could deploy its squad to any threatened area within two minutes, filled that gap.

As the alert progressed, the rest of the QRF platoon's soldiers deployed in their M113s to the front and rear gates, or to the threatened area, to augment the force protection platoon.

Military Police Squad. The MP squad's primary mission was to secure the front gate, also called Guard Post 1. They occupied a small building adjacent to the front gate that housed their weapons, ammunition, radios, and the rest of their equipment. Parked nearby, ready to seal off the gate at a moment's notice, was an M113 with .50 caliber machinegun. Two MPs manned Guard Post 1 at all times. They had several forms of communication that included Motorolas, a VRC-46, and a TA-312 that allowed landline communication directly to the task force TOC. Their rules of engagement were identical to those of the rest of the guards.

In addition, the MPs performed several duties that came with their unique location. The most important of these was the inspection of personnel and vehicles entering and leaving the compound. In an average day, more than 100 vehicles, most of which were ours, passed through the front gate. But more than 50 Macedonians (kitchen police, interpreters, garbagemen) also had unescorted access to the camp, and the compound was open to all U.N. and U.S. personnel and vehicles that showed proper identification.

This did not mean that the MPs waved all familiar vehicles

through the front gate. In fact, they asked each driver, task force or not, whether he had left his vehicle unsecured at any time outside a U.S. or U.N. camp. If the answer was yes, the MPs inspected it using a specially built wheeled mirror to look under the vehicle for a bomb or any other suspicious looking device.

The MPs had a list in their guard shack of the people authorized unaccompanied access to the camp. Before they made this list, all of the Macedonians were screened by the S-2, with help from our civil affairs detachment. Still, inspections as they entered the compound and random inspections as they left kept everyone honest.

When someone arrived at the front gate who did not have unaccompanied access, the MPs called the TOC, which in turn notified the section that had to escort the individual (usually someone from the civil affairs detachment). The visitor surrendered his identification for the duration of his visit, and the MPs kept a log of all visitors, both for security and for alerts.

During alerts, the MPs locked the front gate, pulled their M113 up to block it, and manned one or two of the fighting positions nearby. The rest of the squad rushed immediately to Guard Post 1 and assisted as necessary.

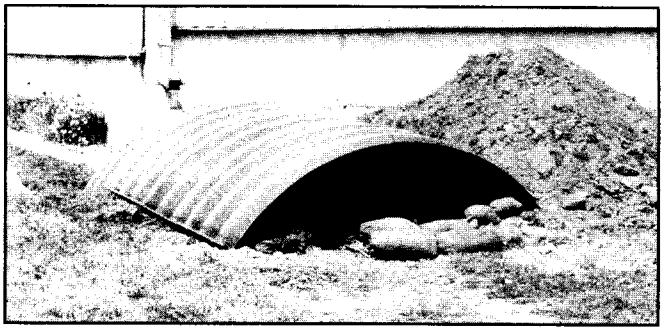
One of the benefits of having MPs dedicated to the front gate was that we did not have to train a new batch of soldiers on this unique duty every three weeks. Also, front-gate duty was something for which the MPs' military occupational specialties prepared them. Unlike many of the mechanized infantrymen in the task force, the MPs did not have to learn a new skill. Their professionalism went a long way toward making a good first impression on those entering the compound.

Construction of Overhead Cover. The priority of defensive work for Camp Able Sentry was to rebuild the fighting positions around the perimeter and build two 40-man shelters. Completing this overhead cover was considered especially important after Serbian missiles had landed dangerously close to the American Camp Pleso near Zagreb, Croatia, earlier in the year.

We had a variety of assets at our disposal with which to complete this work. Our engineer platoon had a small emplacement excavator (SEE), whose backhoe and pneumatic drill attachment proved critical for building the fighting positions and 40-man shelters. Although wood was in short supply, there was no shortage of sandbags, V-shaped pickets, and concertina wire. In addition, we had two unique assets available to us through the U.N. supply system—gabions and Abri shelters.

A gabion is a fence-wire box designed to hold rocks and form a field-expedient barrier. Unfolded, the box is about five feet long, five feet wide, and three feet high. Folded gabions (five feet by three feet by two inches) proved adequate substitutes for plywood. Unlike plywood, in fact, the steel gabions would not rot, and they could bend—two features we would need to construct our fighting positions.

The Abri shelter sections—each made of one-eighth inch thick corrugated steel, curved in a crescent shape six feet long, three feet wide, and weighing 100 pounds—were designed for 40-man shelters but were also ideal cover for fighting positions.



Abri shelter pieces

Completed position with sandbags and missile screen.

After the future location of the fighting positions was marked, the SEE operator and a detail built the first one as a model. After some trial and error, we standardized the design, which required three Abri shelter pieces, eight gabions, 12 pickets, about 200 sandbags, and 12 bolts (used to fasten the gabions to the Abri pieces). The size of the Abri pieces allowed us to build a fighting position much larger than normal—11 feet long, four feet wide, five feet deep. This size allowed four soldiers to man each position comfortably, and six could occupy it if necessary. The Abri pieces, two gabions and sandbags provided more than 18 inches of overhead cover while the other six gabions and the pickets reinforced the walls. Each position also had two one-foot deep grenade sumps on the sides and was covered with a camouflage net.

The SEE took about an hour to dig the position, and another hour to dig the grenade sumps with its pneumatic drill. The remaining work of filling sandbags, pounding pickets took a squad-sized detail the rest of the day. Once a position was completed, the section assigned to it ensured that it was maintained properly.

Also on the compound we found about 25 blast shield pieces measuring two feet by four feet, apparently shipped earlier to Camp Able Sentry from a deactivated missile battery in Europe. Designed to prevent damage to sensitive equipment (such as a Pershing missile), the 75-pound ceramic and Kevlar blast shields were supposedly able to withstand the impact of small arms and shrapnel. Before installing them, we tested and discovered that at very close range (25 meters), the shields stopped single-shot 5.56mm rounds (M16 and M249) and 7.62mm rounds (M60 machinegun), although a burst of six rounds from an M249 in a six-inch by eight-inch area managed to penetrate. Also, if placed the wrong way—Kevlar side instead of the ceramic side toward the enemy—the M16 round not only pen-

etrated but created ceramic spall as it exited the shield. Used properly and with sandbags, the blast shields would be very effective against small arms fire and shrapnel.

We had only enough blast shields to reinforce one area and, because of the vulnerability of the front gate, these shields went to the MP guard shack. After bolts of the right size were purchased locally, a small detail took two days to attach them to the building and reinforce them with sandbags wherever possible.

The 40-man shelters, which resembled underground Quonset huts, presented a different challenge. Designed to withstand a direct hit from a 120mm mortar round, each one was far more labor-intensive and time-consuming than building a four-man fighting position. They took about a month to build and required 18 Abri pieces each, plus a great deal of wood, primarily plywood, to seal off the ends and build the stairs. When completed, a shelter had benches, a gravel floor, lights and outlets for fans or heaters, a ventilation system, and a small space for a field-expedient latrine.

After the fighting positions and shelters were completed, Camp Able Sentry had enough overhead cover for everyone in the compound.

Ammunition. The ASP was in one of the most vulnerable areas in the camp, but the only place in the compound that satisfied the minimum safe distance required for high explosives.

Fortunately, however, the ASP was not the only ammunition storage area in the camp. The MP squad, aviation detachment, force protection platoon, and QRF platoon had their own basic loads stored in flex pallets near their squad or platoon areas. The HHC arms room conex, in the vicinity of the barracks, had a limited supply of small arms ammunition (enough for one 30-round magazine per M16 and one 15-round magazine for each 9mm pistol). Also, flex pallets under four of the 30-foot guard towers provided two basic loads of small arms ammunition and a limited number of smoke grenades and pyrotechnics for each fighting position.

Within each of the four flex pallets were boxes and cans of ammunition. One pallet, for example, contained ammunition for five fighting positions, and each position had a different assortment of weapons (M16s, M249s, or M203s). To avoid confusion and ensure that every fighting position received the correct amount and type of ammunition, each box and can had the position number spray-painted on it. This system worked well.

During alerts, a soldier received 30 rounds of ammunition for his personal defense when he drew his weapon, then drew two basic loads from the flex pallet.

Early in the alert sequence, the ammunition NCO and a detail from the support platoon went to the ASP to issue missiles and explosives to the rest of the task force. Beginning with the scouts at 20 minutes after the alert and continuing every ten minutes, the ammunition NCO issued the platoons AT4s, TOWs, hand grenades, and additional ammunition as necessary.

Alerts. A portable siren in the TOC was used to alert the camp in case of attack. The battle captains decided when to alert the entire camp. If camp security was working properly, the force protection and QRF platoons were already responding to the threat on their own, and the siren was to alert everyone else.

When the siren went off, every soldier moved to his designated section link-up area, usually in the hall where the section slept. Here, the senior NCO conducted a roll call and ensured that each of his soldiers had load-carrying equipment, flak vest, and Kevlar helmet. The section then waited to be called to the arms room conex for weapon and ammunition issue. After drawing his weapon and one magazine, each soldier went to his assigned post. Only about half of the soldiers went to the fighting positions. The rest either had jobs supporting the alert or went to the 40-man bunkers. The scouts and a few civil affairs NCOs moved outside the front gate to provide early warning on the approaches to the camp and to establish liaison with the local Macedonian Army commander.

By far the biggest bottleneck in a no-notice alert was the weapons draw. Although each soldier turned in his weapons card to one of the armorers and received his weapon and magazine, this took time when more than 150 soldiers were drawing weapons. After one confusing rehearsal, we realized that we could not risk having so many soldiers in the open waiting in line to draw weapons.

The solution was to have every section sergeant gather his soldiers indoors in a central location and move to the arms room conex when called. The HHC supply sergeant was in charge of ensuring that the draw went smoothly, and the HHC first sergeant positioned himself nearby to get accountability from the section sergeants as they came through. The armorers organized the arms room conex by section to save time issuing weapons. A list of the draw priority was posted and disseminated, the next rehearsal went much smoother. It took 25 minutes from the start of the alert to the time when every soldier had a weapon (about 10 seconds per soldier).

The MPs determined the exact number of non-combatants we had in the camp. During alerts the visitors and Macedonian workers gathered in the dining facility under the control of one of the civil affairs NCOs. If the alert continued, they were moved to one of the 40-man shelters, and the civil affairs NCO became the shelter NCO in charge.

A decision had to be made early in the alert regarding the aviation detachment. In the event of a real threat, the detachment would cold-start the three Whitehawks and fly to a terrain feature in the opposite direction from the attack. They were expected to have their helicopters in the air within 10 minutes, and since they had their own weapons and ammunition conexes, they were able to meet this standard.

Once all of the battle positions on the perimeter reported REDCON 1 (all soldiers accounted for, all fighting positions manned, and all ammunition issued), the force protection platoon handed over the M113s to the appropriate section, left the guard towers, and acted as the camp reserve. The QRF platoon also collapsed into the center of the perimeter to act as an additional reserve platoon. If necessary, either platoon's soldiers could be used to fill vacancies in the fighting positions caused by leaves, passes, or soldiers off-post.

Unfortunately, Camp Able Sentry had no immediate fire support available. The mortar platoon was in downtown Skopje guarding the U.N. headquarters and could not arrive until well into the alert. Once these soldiers did arrive, however, they were to take up three positions in the center of the compound and provide 81mm mortar support as necessary.

With a surgeon based at the camp and a high-technology medical data transmission system on hand, the medical platoon was easily capable of performing casualty triage. The helicopter pilots and medics rehearsed the routes to the two local hospitals in downtown Skopje for urgent cases.

Mission Preparation

Rehearsals were by far our most important preparation for the mission. Three months before our rotation, we visited Macedonia for a week-long reconnaissance. The unit conducting the mission gave us copies of its SOPs and policies to take back with us, and we incorporated most of them as our own. This visit proved critical to our understanding of the mission and also familiarized us with the camp. When we returned to home station, we put together a training plan that was as realistic as possible, based on our observations.

A local German kaserne provided the setting for the Camp Able Sentry force protection train-up. Although we could not replicate the camp completely, the two-week training event helped all of the platoons understand the force protection mission and the ROEs. We realized early that the soldiers' knowledge and understanding of the ROEs and Actions on Hostile Act was crucial to the security of the camp.

Learn as much as you can about base defense before you deploy.

The field training exercise also identified several weaknesses in our plan. We refined the Threatcon manning requirements and the actions to be taken upon alert, established the force protection matrix and the random guard rotation, and made countless other minor changes. Platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad leaders contributed many of these improvements.

After we deployed and took over the mission, rehearsing the alert procedure in the camp itself led us to several more changes, including using the QRF platoon to augment the force protection platoon, the weapons draw plan, and other improvements. Once again, junior leaders often provided solutions that would make the whole process more efficient.

Local Workers and the U.N.

The United Nations played a far less significant role than we had anticipated, but we did get several important items through the U.N. supply system. The Abri shelter pieces, gabions, and pickets all came from the U.N. On request, the U.N. also sent local workers to complete simple plumbing and maintenance jobs. And we had half a warehouse full of U.N.-delivered items ranging from paper to furniture. Getting what we wanted took a long time, but it was better than nothing.

Having the local people on our side also helped. Since the camp was on the grounds of the Macedonian Army, we had to request approval of any type of ground work through the local Macedonian Army headquarters. They were sometimes reluctant to allow us to make even minor changes to the camp—that is, until the assassination attempt on their president.

When we heard that President Gligorov was gravely injured, we immediately sent our surgeon and the TELEMED system and offered any help needed. A day later, Walter Reed Army Hospital sent a neurosurgeon to render assistance. Although they did not need our help, the Macedonians appreciated the effort. The United States received favorable reports in the local newspapers, and the spirit of cooperation improved.

The following are several recommendations to anyone who is about to take command of a base defense:

Prepare. Learn as much as you can about base defense before you deploy. FM 90-12 is a good place to start. Articles on the Beirut tragedy and recent bombings will provide helpful nuggets of information. Tailor your home station training plan to what the guards need to know. Experiment with different security techniques.

Keep the Wagons Circling. An effective base defense is not built in a day, but it can be improved every day. Establish a priority of work and stick with it. Use whatever equipment and material you have on hand to get the job done. Keep everyone involved in base defense all of the time. Junior leaders will provide you with brilliant ideas on how to make the camp more secure. Establish ownership of fighting positions and guard towers. Frequent rehearsals and alerts will keep the soldiers on their toes and aware of the defense plan. The construction of the perimeter defense may conflict with their other duties, but it has to be completed nonetheless. Schedule the first few camp alerts to reduce interference and increase participation. Pass on to the next unit the uncompleted priority of work and the good ideas that ran out of time.

Inspect. Relentlessly enforce standards. Conduct an inspection of the guard force before these soldiers assume duty. If a soldier does not know the rules of engagement and the local phrase for "Stop or I'll shoot!"—and if he doesn't have a clean weapon—he does not pull guard duty. Do not let an untrained soldier guard your perimeter. Inspect the guards every day and night, and quiz them on what they would do in a given situation. Take a 3x5 card with you and note the guard posts that need repair, the corner that needs a light, the tree that needs trimming, the great idea before it slips away; then see that it gets fixed. Tell the SOG what you saw. Examine and reexamine perimeter weaknesses, and be critical.

Combine standard defense doctrine with a little innovation and a lot of work, and you will be well on your way toward developing an effective base defense.

Captain Craig A. Collier commanded Headquarters Company, 3d Battalion, 12th Infantry, 1st Armored Division, in Macedonia, and is now assigned to the National Training Center. He previously served in the 7th Infantry Division and is a 1986 graduate of the United States Military Academy.